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The President's Page

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President's Page

Dr. Franklyn E. Verdon's Inaugural Address as he assumed office in Houston, Texas on December 9, 1966, provides material for thought in this first issue of *LQ* for the year of his administration. We quote a number of the paragraphs here.

THE EDITORS

Society has always held the medical profession in high esteem. In general, doctors are respected by their fellowmen in the same manner as our clergymen. Such reverence stems from the fact that our careers are concerned with the mystery of life from the time of conception until the moment of death. Yes, life does have a sacramental quality about it which means that we Catholic doctors have added responsibilities. We are not only concerned with life here but in the hereafter as well.

Vatican II's decree on the *Apostolate of the Laity* calls us to a greater share in the work of salvation. The doctrine is not new, but the emphasis certainly is. Our organization, the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds is actually the Apostolate of the Medical Profession. As Catholics we should know and study and meditate on this decree in order to learn how it applies to our profession.

Our apostolate flows from the very fact that we are Christians, followers of Christ. The Council decree reminds us that the modern situation demands of lay people an even more intense apostolate and one broader in scope. This decree describes the modern situation as follows:

The accelerating population increase, the rapid advances of science and technology, the more intimate and complex relationships between peoples, all these have immensely broadened the range of the lay person's apostolate (in which there is generally no substitute for the lay person). Further, the factors mentioned have generated entirely new areas of concern which require expert attention and investigation of lay people. This kind of apostolate becomes all the more urgent because so many areas of human life have inevitably become extremely specialized.

As physicians we are not exempt from the apostolic mission of the Church, the salvation of mankind. On the contrary, we have our particular role to play since ours is a special kind of ministry, one that coincides with our life work. As laymen, we are immersed in the secular world and its activities. We have a definite duty to cultivate a fervent Christian spirit and to act as a yeast in the secular order. The foremost task of every faithful Christian is to pour out his energies so that the divine message of redemption may be heard and welcomed by all men everywhere. Our special ministry is to bring the Christian spirit to the secular world of ailing mankind.

How are we to accomplish such a task? Is it by our individual actions? Yes, but these alone are not sufficient. Organization is also necessary. Since man is a social being, the faithful must exercise their apostolate by uniting their efforts with one another. "They should be apostles in the community of the home, in their parishes and dioceses. . . . and in *freely chosen societies* which they decide to form among themselves." What the Council Fathers are

telling us is that the apostolate can only be effective through the concerted action of *many* and that more effective results can be expected through group action than if each one were acting independently.

This is why I feel that our National Federation is important to the Church. As a lay organization it is, or at least should be, an instrument for service to the Church's mission in the world. Its apostolic value is rooted in the Christian witness and evangelical spirit of the whole organization.

The objectives of our Federation dovetail nicely with the recommendations of Vatican II's decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. Our particular apostolate is expressed in our aim: "to uphold the principles of the Catholic faith and morality as related to the science and practice of medicine." Vatican II reminds us that only we *as laymen* can effectively inject our profession with Christ's message of salvation. Through our efforts and activities the science and practice of medicine must become more and more Christianized, less and less secular in tone. Our Christian spirit is to increase the influence of Christ in our daily contacts in the home, the office and hospital, as well as the community.

We must never lose sight of the fact that our personal salvation is important. However, the spirit of renewal in the Church would have us emphasize the fact that we should be holy not only for our own sakes but that our holiness may actually be a service to mankind. By being holy we are better Christians and living examples of the gospel teachings. This is definitely a service to our fellowman because then he sees (rather than simply being told) what a follower of Christ really is.

While speaking of a sense of values, during this coming year we might well analyze our roles as father of a family. It is not easy to be a doctor's wife or son or daughter. Yes, we love them dearly. But often they are neglected because our patients need us. Our families need us too. We have a definite life-long commitment to them supported by a contract and a sacrament. Our wives are mature enough to understand why we must be away from home so much. However, our children may become emotionally stunted if they are not supported frequently by our presence, our interest in all they do, and especially encouraged by our thoughtfulness and love. During this year it will be well for all of us to examine our relations with our families realizing that the family apostolate is part of the broader apostolate of the laity.

Much has been written on the relation of the physician to his patients. I will limit myself to a simple observation. The central theme of Vatican II is the idea of service, service to mankind. We would all profit from a personal review of our attitudes toward all our patients. If we imbue our daily activities with the Christian idea of service I am sure our dealings with our patients will be improved and become more meaningful.

What can we do to improve our corporate activities during the year? One area where we should stand united is to do all in our power to fight the powerful movement for legalized therapeutic abortion. Our Guilds should be the watch-dog in each State. At the first signs of such a movement speak out *as a group*. Alert other Christian groups to the danger and ask their support to prevent this moral cancer of legalized murder.

For several years, the NFCPG maintained a booth at the A.M.A. convention. I think this was an excellent means for influencing our profession along Christian lines. It made our organization known and showed that we are a dynamic and powerful group which cannot be ignored. I hope you agree with me that this practice should be re-activated.

There is one other observation I wish to make at this time. As a result of Vatican II, dialogue has come into vogue in many areas. Is this prevailing with the medical profession? I do not refer to professional consultations. What I have in mind is a group of doctors meeting regularly to benefit from an exchange of ideas, on an informal basis and in small groups to be more meaningful. Formation of groups would vary with local conditions. In a small town it could be city-wide; in the larger metropolis it might be on a county or district basis or possibly even on a parish level. Clergymen can be called in from time to time to help us resolve moral issues pertaining to our profession. As a result of closer communication with the clergy perhaps conflicting advice or practice can be eliminated, especially in the area of birth control and the contraceptive drugs. Very effective dialogue could be developed for our men in medicine.

We look forward to a year of responsibility but hopeful of cooperation from our constituent members.

FRANKLYN E. VERDON